

Series: **Easter Sunday 2020**

CDOBC

Today's Title: **"Reliable Witness"**

April 12, 2020 - John 20:11-18

Easter Sunday - video sermon

(Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic the Choir Program was canceled - on-line services only)

OBJECTIVE: To help people see the hope and transformation available to us through the resurrection.

We have church on Sundays - because of the resurrection of Jesus.

We gather together on Sunday morning - because of the empty tomb!

We don't celebrate every Friday night - the day of His crucifixion - nor Thursdays in honor of the last supper and His arrest.

We don't gather on the Jewish Sabbath - Saturday - but on Sunday!

In Israel, Sunday is the 1st day of their work week.

In the United States - and other countries where Christianity was the dominant faith when the culture was formed - Sunday is the 1st day of the week - but Monday is the 1st workday of the week - because of the resurrection of Jesus!

When you read through the Gospels you will find the accounts of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

In the Gospels - and the rest of the N.T. we find 8 resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Resurrection Appearances:

1. Mary Magdalene - **Sunday morning** - **John 20:11-18** (Mark 16:9-11)
2. The women - **Sunday morning** - **Mary** - (mother of James and Joseph and wife of Clopas - Matt. 27:56; John 19:25); **Salome** (mother of James and John, wife of Zebedee - Mark 16:1; Matt. 27:56) **Matthew 28:8-10**
3. Road to Emmaus - **Sunday mid-late morning/afternoon?** - **2** disciples - **Luke 24:13-35** (Mark 16:12-13)
4. Disciples in upper room - w/out Thomas - **Sunday night** - **John 20:19-23; Luke 24:36-49**
5. Disciples in upper room - with Thomas - **8 days later** - **John 20:24-29** (Mark 16:14)
6. Shore - Sea of Galilee / Breakfast - 7 disciples - **sometime later** - **John 21:1-14**
7. 500+ people - **various times before His ascension** - **1 Corinthians 15:1-7**
8. Saul/Paul - **Road to Damascus** - **1 Corinthians 15:8; Acts 9:1-19**

This morning, I want us to look at the 1st appearance - the resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene - her last name tells us where she is from - the town of Magdala - which was a small town by the Sea of Galilee.

When we were in Israel last month, we stayed at a new hotel there - called Magdala.

It was a beautiful hotel - had a wonderful time there - but when they were building the hotel, they discovered some amazing ruins!

The center point of the ruins is a synagogue which dates to the time of Christ - 1st century - and the hotel was built right next to all of this!

Mary - who is from Magdala - had a difficult past. We are first introduced to her in the Gospel of Luke (chapter 8) - and she is listed there - along with the 12 disciples and some other women.

Luke 8:1-3

“Soon afterward He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.”

Jesus included women in His ministry. They were an essential part of the team. They funded the work.

“Soon afterward” connects us with the previous chapter where Jesus was the dinner guest of a Pharisee - who didn't wash Jesus' feet upon entering the home which would have been a normal courtesy - and something done to keep the house clean. But Luke tells us a

woman - known as a sinner - perhaps a prostitute? - entered the home and while the dinner party was in full-swing, she stood behind Jesus - where His feet would have been since they reclined at a table - no chairs like we have chairs - and she proceeds to wash Jesus' feet with her tears - and then she anoints His feet with some very expensive perfume.

This didn't go over so well with the Pharisee - who wouldn't let this woman get close to him - he's too good for that!

It's after this account that Luke says, "Soon afterward". Some think the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in **Luke 7** (who is unnamed) is Mary Magdalene - but the truth is we have no idea who she is. What we know is Mary from Magdala had a difficult past.

We are told in **8:1** that Jesus is going "through the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God."

Then in **vs. 2** we're introduced to some women - and this is our introduction to Mary from Magdala - Mary Magdalene.

"and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out..."

There's not much we know about Mary Magdalene - but we know she became a follower of Jesus - someone who

dedicated her life to following Jesus and financially supporting His ministry.

According to Strong's Accordance, Mary Magdalene is referred to in 13 other passages in the Gospels.

She has a unique position in the Gospels - and in Christian history - because she is the first eyewitness of the resurrected Christ.

The fact that the first witness who sees Jesus resurrected is a woman - and the second witnesses who see Jesus is a group of women - is a significant statement by God Himself about the value and importance of women.

In Jewish culture - not only would a typical Rabbi not have women in their group of disciples, but in Jewish courts of law a woman's testimony was not considered as evidence in a trial.

But in the eyes of God, the testimony of women is just fine - He makes women the first witnesses of the risen Christ!

With that, turn to **John 20:11-18**

In **vs. 1-10** of the chapter, John establishes the fact that the tomb is empty.

One thing you notice when reading the resurrection accounts is the disciples did not expect a resurrection.

They weren't thinking about a resurrection - they were in hiding - '*staying at home*' if you will!

vs. 1 - Mary Magdalene - with the other women - go to the tomb “while it was still dark” and they notice “the stone had been taken away from the tomb” - which told them the tomb was not sealed - it was open.

vs. 2 - Mary Magdalene runs to the disciples - she goes to Peter and John - and tells them “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

Resurrection was not in their thinking!

She thinks someone moved or stole the body - and she’s horrified! Peter and John sprint to the tomb - we’re not told specifically, but Mary goes back also - and we pick up her story again in vs. 11.

Read vs. 11-15

No resurrection = no joy. vs. 11-15

Mary Magdalene is overcome with sorrow.

vs. 11 - The Greek term translated “weeping” is the same word used in John 11 as the people were weeping over the death of Lazarus. The word means *to weep aloud - uncontrollable audible grief - to mourn - lament.*

Mary can’t believe it. Jesus is dead. Crucified... and she watched the entire horrific process - from beginning to end. She was there when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus quickly cleaned the body and wrapped it - with spices - and placed it in

the Garden tomb. They barely got that done before Sabbath which began at sundown on Friday night. Sunday morning was the first chance to have daylight - so they could come and finish preparing the body with additional spices and anointing. Now someone has taken the body - talk about stepping on your throat when you're down! Imagine going to your loved-one's grave - and you find the grave dug up - and the casket is gone - and nobody told you what was happening!

- Without resurrection there's no joy.
- Without resurrection - death dominates.
- Without resurrection - hope is a fantasy.
- Reality is death.

This is what she's thinking. There are no other options in her thinking - someone took the body, and nobody has told them anything!

When Mary first came to the tomb with the other women, as soon as she saw the stone was moved and the tomb was open - she ran to the disciples. Now, her 2nd visit to the tomb in the early morning - she looks inside, and she sees:

(Garden tomb pics)

“two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.”

When you read the text, it doesn't seem like she realizes these 2 figures sitting in the tomb are angels. She is not afraid - as everyone else is when they encounter an angel.

They ask her why she's "weeping" - and she says, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

Think about this exchange for a minute.

Don't let the familiar cause you to miss the details. The angels are sitting in a tomb - where a dead body was a short time ago. A woman looking for the body stoops into the doorway of the tomb to look inside - and one of them asks her why she's "weeping".

It's a weird question - if this was a normal situation.

It's like going to a funeral home - or to a cemetery - and asking someone there why they're "weeping".

Because this is the place people cry - where their heart is broken - because their dead friend or family member is here!

But they ask this question - why?

- Because she (and the disciples) should have known better.
- She should have known that Jesus wasn't going to stay in the grave.

- She should have been expecting His resurrection.
- Jesus told them He was going to rise from the dead.
- He told them what was going to happen.

Mark 9:31-32

...for He was teaching His disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And when He is killed, after three days He will rise.” But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him.”

(See also Matt. 12:39-40)

That’s so funny! People haven’t changed in 2,000 years. I don’t care what technology we have now - what knowledge we have now compared to them - we are all afraid to look dumb.

We’re afraid to say those 3 little words: *‘I don’t know.’*

I’m pretty sure they understood the words Jesus said - but they couldn’t understand what He said.

“...after three days I will rise”

- Can you tell me what He just said?
- What does He mean by that?
- I’m not going to ask Him - you ask him!
- Let’s just wait...Peter will ask Him.

This is why the angels are sitting in the tomb - where Jesus’ head and feet were - and they’re having a great time in there - the most amazing

things just happened - something all of Heaven no doubt was marveling at and celebrating - and one of Jesus' followers walks in - who Jesus told what was going to happen - the tomb is empty - "Why are you weeping?"

Mary Magdalene tells them why she's weeping - and either she hears a noise behind her - or she senses some movement behind her - or the angles look past her - which cues her that someone might be behind her.

She turns around - and it's Jesus - but she doesn't know it's Jesus.

(vs. 15 - Jesus asks the same question as the angels - probably for the same reason.)

Why can't she recognize Him?

- It's still very early - and still a bit dark.
- Her eyes are full of tears - so her vision might be a bit blurred.
- Jesus has a resurrection body - which is similar to His pre-resurrection body, but also different.

She thinks He's the gardener and asks Him where He put the body. She says: *'Just tell me and I'll get it and move it.'*

That's impressive! All by herself?

When there's no resurrection - when the extent of your life ends at the grave - when this is all there is - your joy is very brief...short-lived.

Like Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes** - "A chasing after the wind...meaningless"

Depression - why bother - who cares - if my time in this body is all there is.

- Why bother do anything good?
- Why bother doing anything for someone else?
- Why don't I just live for myself - do everything I want - if there's nothing beyond this life?

If there's no God - no judgment - no reckoning - no justice for wrong-doing - if there's no authority above me to decide what's right and wrong - if I'm the judge and jury of what's right and wrong - then why bother trying to meet anyone else's standard or definition of right and wrong / good and bad?

Answer: Because there is something beyond the grave - there is an authority over each of us - and the resurrection of Jesus - and all the miracles of Jesus prove this point!

No resurrection = no joy!

Resurrection leads to joy and hope! vs. 16-18

Everything changes when Jesus speaks her name - and she hears that familiar tone - accent - pronunciation.

Jesus said “My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me.”

- John 10:27

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.””

18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” -- and that He had said these things to her.”

What do you think the rest of her day was like?

- Pretty excited?
- Confused?
- Pinching herself?
- Frustrated because others didn't believe her?
- All of the above?

As soon as she realizes it's Jesus - she embraces Him.

She's holding on to Him - she's not letting Him go anywhere!

But He isn't staying.

Once again...He told them this - He told them He was going away (John 13:33 “Where I am going you cannot come.”)

He tells her to let go - “Don’t cling to Me”

Why? Because He must ascend to His Father - and He comforts her by affirming her faith - her place in the ‘family’.

“My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”

He tells her to “go to My brothers” - 1st time in the Gospel of John Jesus calls the disciples “brothers”. He says go tell them I’m ascending to My Father, which she does.

Peter was one of those disciples.

He was at the tomb earlier - with John - and they saw the empty tomb - but they didn’t see the risen Jesus yet.

Years later Peter wrote:

1 Peter 1:3

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

Our hope - our joy - is based on “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Peter tells us the foundation of our hope / joy is Jesus’ resurrection - but we must have faith - to be

“born again” - and this is only possible due to the “great mercy” of God.

Mary Magdalene’s day started with great sorrow - which turned into “weeping”, sobbing and many tears - only to turn into great joy!

But I’m pretty sure she was frustrated too.

Luke 24:10-11

“Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

No matter how frustrating...her joy was greater.

She couldn’t keep from smiling - and praising God.

Apply it...

It’s Easter Sunday - *At Home Version*

Easter is not determined by your location.

It’s not determined by your limitations.

There are Christians all over the world who aren’t able to gather together to celebrate this day.

In many cases today it’s due to Coronavirus safeguards - but in other cases - and throughout history - they haven’t gathered together because of the threat of being imprisoned or killed if they did.

Sometimes they would risk the penalty - but many times - most of the time - they would celebrate this day - at home with their family.

As I said last week - we will have a glorious celebration of Easter when we are able to worship in the same location again - but don't let your location or surrounding determine your joy today. Your joy is because Jesus is alive - the tomb is empty - “Why are you weeping?”

I would ask you, *‘Why are you sad?’*

‘Why are you letting our circumstance determine your joy?’

Jesus is not dead - He is alive!

Death has been defeated - you have a “living hope” - not an empty or foolish hope - a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

Go and tell everyone you know.

Jesus is alive!

Let's pray